

## BOOK REVIEWS

**Proceedings of the Third Panamerican Conference of Leprology.** (Memoria de la Tercera Conferencia Panamericana de Leprología.) 1953. Vol. 1, 417 pages; Vol. 2, 363 pages. Illustrated, indexed. Ministerio de Salud Pública, Buenos Aires.

This conference was held under the auspices of the Argentine government in Buenos Aires in December, 1951, and, as to be expected, the majority of the delegates were Argentine. An account is given of the various activities of the conference, and scientific proceedings are given in full with half-tone illustrations [reproduction is mostly poor], graphs, and Tables. The themes for discussion were:

- (1) The classification of leprosy.
- (2) The lepra reaction, its pathogenesis, treatment and prognosis, and its influence on the development of the disease.
- (3) Reversibility of clinical forms and of the reactions to the Mitsuda test.
- (4) Present state of antileprosy campaigns.
- (5) Social assistance of lepers and of their families.

Most of the papers and records of discussion are in Spanish or Portuguese, some are in French, while four papers are in English including G. Cochrane's contribution on the classification of leprosy. Neural reactions and the place of surgery in their treatment are described by M. Guadagnini. The Lepra reaction, spontaneous and provoked, is discussed, C. Silva and L. de Andrade outline further experience with haemagglutination tests. Leprosy control in the various participating countries is detailed. J. Stancioli and E. M. Pires report that 100 patients with tuberculosis all reacted positively to the Mitsuda test, the reactions being very strong in 54; they and other contributors discuss the immunity relationship between tuberculosis and leprosy. The control of non-contagious cases is detailed by A. Rotberg and L. M. Bechelli. R. F. Vautray outlines the unfortunate results of the Venezuelan law of 1942 which permitted the marriage of lepers but only after sterilization of the male partner. The use of thiosemicarbazones is discussed and B. Goldemberg describes plastic surgery in lepers. M. G. Malfatti and E. D. Jonquieres discuss and illustrate the appearance of *M. leprae*, as seen by means of the electron microscope, in treated cases. R. N. Miranda records a case in which leprosy was directly transmitted by the intramuscular injection of blood. L. Doub and E. Payne discuss (in English) therapeutic results and chemical structure in the treatment of leprosy, the trend to substitute DADS for its hydrolysable derivations is not necessarily sound, and the development of new treatments should not depend entirely upon trials in tuberculosis.

The conclusions of committees, upon each theme, are presented in their final form after approval by the assembly. In considering the third theme the wider use

of B.C.G. is recommended to determine its value in leprosy.

Conclusions are published in the four official languages of the conference but the English translation is poor, both here and in the few cases where a paper is summarized in English.

E. D.

**Should the Patient Know the Truth? A response of Physicians, Nurses, Clergymen, and Lawyers.** Edited by Samuel Standard and Helmouth Nathan. 1955. Pp. 160. Springer, New York; Interscience Publishers, London. (Flexible cover, 15s.; bound 22s.)

The questioning title of this book must have a familiar ring to each and every doctor no matter what path, general or special, he may have chosen to follow. Altogether 24 contributors including eleven doctors, many eminent in their own field, nurses, parsons of various denominations, and lawyers give their answer to the question. A wide variety of thoughts are expressed between and including the straightforward "Yes" and "No".

The essential difficulty is well put by B. C. Meyer who answers question with question, saying, "What patient and what truth?" Dr. Paul White's thoughtful contribution bids us spend time in considerate discussion with the patient. He says, "It is the fear of the unknown and the brief mysterious statements and prognostications that does the greatest harm." We should guard against the fear precipitated by the unspoken truth. Another contributor recommends the truth as an instrument of therapy. There are repeated warnings regarding the loneliness of the patient with incurable disease. In this regard the stable and well integrated family is of the utmost value.

Patients often see in their nurses the hope of learning the whole truth about diagnosis and prognosis and, whilst the duty of the nurse is clear, it is not always easy. It would seem to the reviewer that when a patient is asking questions regarding his disease and his future, this should be reported to the physician or surgeon as routine. Not all would agree with Miss Wolff when she puts the onus on the patient to ask the doctor for information. The psychological aspects of incurable illness are well debated. The mentally robust man may find the truth of a diagnosis of incurable disease unbearable, whilst the neurotic woman may find such truth the oil on the troubled waters of her life-long conflicts.

While there is little that deals directly with venereology in this book, those of us undertaking the treatment and long follow-up of late syphilitics will find much that is useful. The term "think piece" has been applied to some American writings, and no better name could be applied to this collection of opinions on the subject of "telling the patient the truth".

R. S. M.